

## Message Text

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EXDIS

DEPARTMENT PASS TO SECDEF, CINCPAC, CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, TH

SUBJECT: FUTURE US FORCE LEVELS IN THAILAND

1. SUMMARY: A US DRAWDOWN PACKAGE AGREED ON WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF THAILAND IN MARCH 1974 HAS BEEN COMPLETED, ITS GOALS SOMEWHAT EXCEEDED. SEVERAL OPTIONS FOR FUTURE DRAWDOWNS HAVE BEEN UNDER CONSIDERATION IN WASHINGTON. PRESSURE IS BUILDING UP IN THAILAND FOR BILATERAL CONSULTATION AT AN EARLY DATE ON FUTURE FORCE LEVELS. EMBASSY CONSIDERS IT URGENT THAT WASHINGTON DECISIONS BE MADE IN PREPARATION FOR MEANINGFUL CONSULTATION WITH THAILAND ABOUT MID-JANUARY. END SUMMARY

2. AFTER CONSULTATION WITH THE RTG IN MARCH OF 1974, THE US INITIATED A DRAWDOWN OF FORCES AND UNITS IN THAILAND TO BE COMPLETED BY DECEMBER 31. THE AGREED GOAL, PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED, WAS A DRAWDOWN OF 10,000 SLOTS (I.E., FROM 37,000 TO 27,000). IN FACT, THE ANNOUNCED DRAWDOWN TARGET OF 10,000 SLOTS WAS GENERALLY CONSTRUED BY THE THAI AS REFERRING TO PERSONNEL (I.E., FACES RATHER THAN SPACES), AND THERE WERE AT THE TIME 35,000 US FORCES PERSONNEL IN THAILAND. BY DECEMBER 31, THERE WILL BE ABOUT 24,000 US FORCES PERSONNEL IN THAILAND, THEREBY EXCEEDING THE GOAL, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER FACES OR

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SPACES.

3. THE QUESTION OF WHAT COMES NEXT IS NOW BEING RAISED WITH INCREASED FREQUENCY AMONG THE THAI. IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS FROM THE PRESS, THAI OFFICIALS HAVE SPOKEN VAGUELY OF US-THAI CONSULTATION TO BE HELD SOMETIME AFTER DECEMBER 31, BUT AS PRESS INTEREST PERSISTS AND INTENSIFIED, A FEELING OF NEED FOR SOME EVIDENCE OF MOVEMENT IS DEVELOPING AMONG THESE OFFICIALS.

4. ON DECEMBER 26, FOR EXAMPLE, FOREIGN MINISTER CHARUNPHAN RAISED THE QUESTION OF FURTHER CONSULTATION ON FORCE LEVELS WITH THE AMBASSADOR. CHARUNPHAN SAID HE WAS BEING PUSHED BY THE PRESS ON THE TIMING OF RESUMED FORCE LEVEL NEGOTIATIONS. THE PRESS, HE SAID, WAS REPEATING A RUMOR TO THE EFFECT THAT NO MORE WITHDRAWALS ARE IN THE OFFING. CHARUNPHAN SUGGESTED TO THE AMBASSADOR THAT THE WORKING GROUP THAT HAD CONSULTED AND DRAWN UP THE DRAWDOWN PACKAGE IN MARCH SHOULD BE RECONVENED AROUND JANUARY 10 OR 15, 1975. THIS WOULD ENABLE THE THAI GOVERNMENT TO ANNOUNCE THAT DISCUSSION OF US FORCE LEVELS IN THAILAND HAD BEEN FORMALLY RESUMED.

5. WE SOUNDED OUT SUPREME COMMAND (DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF GENERAL CHAROEN PONGPANICH) THE FOLLOWING DAY ON THIS IDEA. CHAROEN VIGOROUSLY ENDORSED IT. HOWEVER, WHILE CHARUNPHAN HAD EVIDENTLY REGARDED THE RESUMPTION OF DISCUSSIONS AS NOT NECESSARILY SUBSTANTIVE AND MORE FOR COSMETIC PURPOSES, CHAROEN CLEARLY THOUGHT THEY SHOULD DEAL WITH SUBSTANCE AND THAT AGREEMENT SHOULD BE REACHED. HE THEORIZED THAT THE US TROOP PRESENCE IN THAILAND WOULD NOT BE A SERIOUS CAMPAIGN ISSUE, BUT THAT IT WOULD BE A CENTRAL ISSUE WITH THE NEW PARLIAMENT. IN HIS VIEW, THE US AND THE RTG SHOULD MAKE DECISIONS AND COMMITMENTS BEFORE THAT TIME SO THAT THE US PRESENCE WOULD NOT BECOME A POLITICAL FOOTBALL.

6. CHAROEN DID NOT GIVE HIS IDEAS ON WHAT FUTURE  
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FORCE LEVELS SHOULD BE, BUT WE UNDERSTAND THAT THERE IS GROWING SENTIMENT AMONG THE THAI MILITARY AGAINST FUTURE REDUCTIONS. IF THIS IS SO, IT SEEMS PROBABLE THAT CHAROEN WISHES TO NAIL THIS DOWN BEFORE THE ELECTIONS. WE POINTED OUT TO CHAROEN THAT THE US MIGHT NOT BE PREPARED AS EARLY AS MID-JANUARY FOR DETAILED SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSION, BUT HE CONTINUED TO PRESS HIS POINT.

7. THE RTG'S, AND PARTICULARLY SUPREME COMMAND'S, INTEREST IN EARLY DISCUSSION IS PROBABLY WHETTED BY THE FACT THAT A DRAWDOWN OF SORTS IS CONTINUING EVEN THOUGH THE MARCH 1974 GOALS HAVE ALREADY BEEN MET. HIGHER US COMMANDS WITH FORCES IN THAILAND ARE MAKING ADMINISTRATIVE PREPARATIONS IN ANTICIPATION OF DRAWDOWNS TO COME. THIS MEANS, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT CERTAIN SLOTS ARE NOT BEING FILLED AS THE INCUMBENTS ROTATE OUT OF THAILAND. THIS INFORMAL DRAWDOWN BY ATTRITION IS, OF COURSE, REFLECTED IN THE MONTHLY US MILITARY POPULATION STATISTICS SUPPLIED TO THE RTG, AND THE RTG HAS NOT FAILED TO NOTICE IT. BY ITS VERY NATURE, IT DOES NOT LEND ITSELF TO CONSULTATIONS, AND SO THE THAI PERCEIVE A PROCESS AT WORK WHICH HAS NOT BEEN EXPLAINED TO THEM

8. WE SEE NO WAY TO DECLINE CHARUNPHAN'S INVITATION TO RESUME FORCE LEVEL DISCUSSIONS IN MID-JANUARY. THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT WILL NOT WISH TO BE EXPOSED TO CHARGES BY ITS SUCCESSOR THAT IT WAS REMISS IN ITS STEWARDSHIP OF THAI INTEREST, AND FOR THAT REASON WE DOUBT THAT THE MATTER CAN BE DEFERRED UNTIL AFTER THE ELECTIONS.

9. WE RECOGNIZE THE COMPLEX NATURE OF WASHINGTON DELIBERATIONS ON THIS SUBJECT. IN PARTICULAR WE ARE AWARE OF THE POSSIBLE STATESIDE DESIRABILITY OF ANNOUNCING SOME POTENTIAL WITHDRAWALS VERSUS THE ADVERSE EFFECT THAT SUCH ANNOUNCEMENTS MIGHT HAVE ON WHATEVER DETERRENT EFFECT THE PRESENCE OF THESE US FORCES HAS ON HANOI'S DECISION-MAKERS. AT THE VERY LEAST IT WILL BE NECESSARY TO SAY HERE BEFORE VERY LONG THAT DISCUSSIONS ON FORCE LEVELS ARE UNDERWAY  
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EVEN THOUGH SPECIFIC ANNOUNCEMENTS TO BE MADE INITIALLY BY THE RTG CAN BE DELAYED TO THE MOST PROPITIOUS TIME. CONSEQUENTLY IT WOULD BE EXTREMELY USEFUL IF WE WERE ABLE TO ENTER THESE DISCUSSIONS WITH AS CLEAR AS POSSIBLE AN IDEA OF WHERE WASHINGTON WANTS TO GO IN THAILAND. IF COMPLETE CLARITY IS NOT OBTAINABLE AT THIS POINT, WE SHOULD AT LEAST BE GIVEN GUIDANCE AS TO TIMING AND APPROXIMATE ORDERS OF MAGNITUDE OF FUTURE DRAWDOWNS.

10. WE HOPE THAT THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN WASHINGTON CAN BE ACCELERATED TO THE UTMOST ANDDD THAT WE CAN BE GIVEN SOLID GUIDANCE IN PREPARATION FOR DISCUSSIONS WITH THE THAI IN MID-JANUARY.  
KINTNER

NOTE BY OCT: NOT PASSED ABOVE ADDRESSEES.

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